



The Family Connection

News to Use for families of young adolescents

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What Makes Young Adolescents Tick—Continuing the Journey

Young adolescents, 10- to 15-year-olds, are going through a time of unprecedented growth and change. It is critical for parents and all adults who work with them to understand the diverse ways in which they develop. In Volume 10, Issue 2 of *The Family Connection*, we discussed several characteristics of physical and intellectual growth and development. Here, we continue our discussion of moral, psychological, and social-emotional development.



In the area of moral development, young adolescents

- Are in transition from moral reasoning that focuses on “what’s in it for me” to that which considers the feelings and rights of others.
- Increasingly are capable of assessing moral matters in shades of grey, as opposed to viewing them in black and white terms more characteristic of younger children.
- Are moving from acceptance of adult moral judgments to developing their own personal values; nevertheless, they tend to embrace major values consonant with those of their parents and other valued adults.

In the area of psychological development, young adolescents

- Are often preoccupied with self.
- Are psychologically vulnerable, because at no other stage in development are they more likely to encounter and be aware of so many differences between themselves and others.
- Are also psychologically resilient; across diversities in race and ethnicity, residence, or socioeconomic status, young adolescents tend to be optimistic and have a generally positive view of their personal future.

In the area of social-emotional development, young adolescents

- Have a strong need for approval and may be easily discouraged.
- Have a strong need to belong to a group, with approval of peers becoming as important as adult approval, and on some matters even more important.
- In their search for group membership, may experience significant embarrassment, ridicule, or rejection from those in other cliques from which they are excluded.

From *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (2003), “Characteristics of Young Adolescents,” by Dr. Peter Scales, available from National Middle School Association at www.nmsa.org or 1-800-528-NMSA.

Parents Ask

Q: *Last year was not a stellar academic year for my middle school son. He is more than capable, but he did not apply himself and now doesn’t see himself as a strong student. How can I help him turn that around this year so that he is successful?*

A: One great thing about young adolescents is their ability to “reinvent” themselves on short notice. With some support and monitoring by you at home (see above article) and his teachers at school, your son can demonstrate his abilities. Start talking with him about the new school year—what worked last year, what didn’t, and how he would like this year to be different. What exactly does he have to do to make it the kind of year he would like? Keep an assignment notebook. Set aside an hour or two every night for homework and sit down with a parent to review homework completed. The most important thing your son needs to know is that he has the ability to turn himself around, and you are ready to stand behind him to assist.



The Right Amount of Help From Parents

Parents of young adolescents must learn to give the right amount of assistance as their children transition into middle school—facing new demands in homework and studying for tests. Here are some tips:

Organize assignments:

- Identify what parts of homework descriptions are not clearly understood.
- Decide what homework to work on first, then next, and so on.
- Establish clear guidelines for effective studying (e.g., work at desk in front bedroom, work at dining room table, work with or without music).



Do the assignment for each class:

- Complete the assigned work for each class.
- Learn the terms or concepts that are included in the assignment.
- Proofread the assignment.
- Determine what to add or subtract from the work.
- Access supplementary materials (books, Web sites, dictionary) to get more information.

Check the completed assignment:

- Evaluate the accuracy of the work done.
- Check to see if work completed meets the required standards.
- Double check to be certain that all aspects of assignment are completed.
- Match completed work against an evaluative scoring description.

Study for tests:

- Organize all materials to be reviewed or studied.
- Make study or review aids (e.g., flash cards, crosswords, questions with answers, list of terms).
- Review all materials several times.

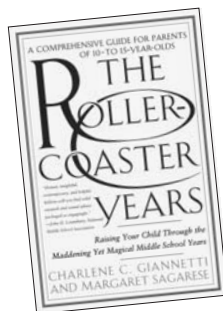
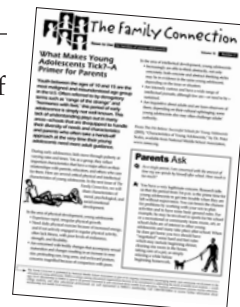
Thanks to John Pickering, former middle level teacher and University of Maine education professor, for sharing the list of useful ideas he developed for his grandchildren as they entered middle school.

Tips For Parents

The new school year is a time for parents to do their homework as well as encourage their young adolescents to do the same. Here are three excellent and inspiring sources for parents.

The Family Connection

National Middle School Association's Web site (www.nmsa.org) is a wealth of information for parents. Back issues of *The Family Connection* are available online. View the 17-minute segment of Fundamentals for Student Success in the Middle Grades or surf the many resources about parent support and involvement.

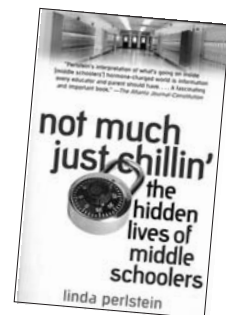


The Roller-Coaster Years

The Roller-Coaster Years by Margaret Sagarese and Charlene Giannetti is a lively account of loving, living with, and parenting 10- to 15-year-olds. The authors do not shy away from difficult topics such as: appearance anxiety; the battle for independence; friendship and peer pressure; sexual awakening; the lure of tobacco, drugs, and alcohol; and sticky questions about your own past.

Not Much Just Chillin'

Another must-read for parents is *Not Much Just Chillin': The Hidden Lives of Middle Schoolers* by Linda Perlstein. Perlstein spent a year immersed in the lunchrooms, classrooms, hearts, and minds of a group of suburban Maryland middle schoolers and emerged with this path-breaking account about puberty, schoolwork, romance, identity, and new kinds of relationships with peers and parents.



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➤ **About the Editors:** Edward Brazee is editor of professional publications for National Middle School Association and professor of middle level education at the University of Maine. Constance Carter is director of Operation Breaking Stereotypes, a nonprofit organization that facilitates exchanges between rural and inner-city middle schools and high schools.